DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 052 459 AC 010 499

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TITLE Some Factors Influencing the Length of Tenure of County Extension Agents, 4-H in Ohio.
INSTITUTION Ohio State Univ., Columbus. Dept. of Agricultural Education.
PUB DATE 70
NOTE 19p.; Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.S. degree

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Employee Attitudes, *Job Tenure, *Questionnaires

ABSTRACT

The perceptions of county Extension agents, 4-H relative to selected factors influencing length of tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service were studied. A questionnaire was sent to 128 present and former agents. Of these, 118 usable ones were returned. Conclusions are: (1) The attitudes of agents toward salary and in-service training were associated with length of tenure; (2) No significant differences existed in ranking of factors, by agent groups, in the position features of job requirements and analysis, policy, working relations, family and personal features, and pre-service training. (CK)

ED052459

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ABSTRACT

SOME FACTORS INFLUENCING THE LENGTH OF TENURE OF COUNTY EXTENSION AGENTS, 4-H IN OHIO

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Science

by

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1970

Abstract by:

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The primary purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of county Extension agents, 4-H relative to selected factors influencing length of tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service from July 1, 1958 to June 30, 1968. The findings of the study may have implications for the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service as well as in other states. Extension administrators may be able to utilize the findings in making policy decisions, defining position descriptions, developing criteria for evaluation of prospective personnel, and in formulating organizational goals.

Objectives

Two general objectives were defined for the study. The first had nine sub-objectives, each related to a selected "feature grouping" as noted below. The second objective was related to background data on the respondents.

Objective 1

To determine the attitudes of county Extension agents, 4-H toward the following position features (groups of factors) that are associated with length of tenure:

1. job requirement factors
2. job analysis factors
3. salary factors
4. policy factors
5. working relations factors
6. family factors
7. personal factors
8. pre-service training factors
9. in-service training factors

Objective 2

To study the relationships between background information and the tenure of county Extension agents, 4-H, a mail questionnaire was used to secure information for this study. The questionnaire had three sections: (1) general background information, (2) attitudinal scale on factors influencing tenure, (3) open-end questions on desirable and undesirable features of the county 4-H position.

Personnel records were used to identify the 211 men and 2 women who had held the county Extension agent, 4-H position during the period of July 1, 1958 through June 30, 1968. These 4-H agents were divided into three categories, based upon their employment records. Those who were still in the position at the end of the base period were assigned to the classification of "present county Extension agent, 4-H." The agents who had resigned the county 4-H position to accept another position with the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service during the base period were classified as "former-continued county Extension agent, 4-H." The remaining agents, who had resigned their county 4-H position during the base period to accept employment outside of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, were assigned to the classification of "former-discontinued county Extension agent, 4-H." A total of 60 per cent of those personnel in each of the three agent classification groups were randomly selected to be included in the study.

The questionnaire was sent to 128 present and former agents on June 12, 1970. This number included 39 agents in the present group, 43 in the former-continued group, and 46 in the former-discontinued group. A total of 118 usable questionnaires were returned in time to be included in the study. This provided a 92 per cent response.

The backgrounds of the respondents were analyzed by computing mean scores on the data collected. Comparisons were made among the agent classification groups by use of mean scores.

Agent attitudes toward 76 factors influencing the length of tenure were obtained from responses to a five-point attitudinal scale for each factor. A mean weighted score was computed for each position factor by agent classification group and a composite mean was computed for all respondents. The 76 position factors were further analyzed by categorizing them into the nine position feature groupings (identified in Objective 1) with the factors in each grouping ranked by the mean scores of the agent classification groups. A rank order correlation was computed between the mean score rankings of each agent group pairing in an effort to identify differences or similarities in attitudes between the three agent groups.

A total of 800 personal comments was received from the respondents on two open-end questions requesting identification of the most desirable and undesirable features of the county Extension agent, 4-H position. The 329 desirable and 471 undesirable comments were analyzed by identifying them with their corresponding position feature factors, thus providing supportive information for the attitudinal responses received for each of the position factors.

Summary of Findings

General Background Information

Information collected on the backgrounds of the county Extension agent, 4-H respondents provided factual data on personal characteristics, training, and experience which might affect their length of tenure.

The extent of respondent participation in youth organizations did not indicate any differences among the agent classification groups which might provide implications for length of tenure in the county 4-H position. The church, 4-H Club Work, and the Future Farmers of America were the youth organizations in which the greatest percentage of respondents participated. The former-continued group was slightly lower in its percentage of participation and mean years of membership, while the former-discontinued group had a somewhat longer mean membership tenure.

There was very little difference between the former-continued and former-discontinued groups according to the time relationship between serving in the military and Extension. More than 50 per cent of the present agent group had not served in the armed forces, while less than one-third of those in the two former groups had not served in the military. A composite of 38 per cent of the respondents had no military service, 48 per cent had completed their military service prior to Extension employment, 10 per cent while employed in Extension, and 4 per cent served in the military both prior to and during their Extension employment.

The agents in the two former agent groups generally considered doing Extension work earlier than those agents in the present group. A total of 41 per cent of the respondents entertained the idea of Extension employment after their college graduation, 39 per cent while enrolled in college, and the other 20 per cent prior to starting college. While the greatest percentage of former agents considered Extension employment while in college, the largest percentage of present agents did not consider it until they were employed in another occupation after their college graduation. There is much similarity between the two former agent groups in relation to the time of

considering Extension employment.

The decision of 47 per cent of the respondents to become an employee of the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service was influenced by Extension personnel and image of Extension agents. The agents in the former-discontinued group were not so greatly influenced by these factors, only 34 per cent compared to an average of 55 per cent in the other two groups. They were more readily influenced than the others by the nature of the work and the opportunity for personal growth. The present agents were influenced more by the opportunity to serve people and availability of a position than were the former agents. The agents in the present-continued group were influenced more than the others by their experience as 4-H members.

Approximately 67 per cent of the respondents planned to make Extension work a career at the time of their employment, while only 34 per cent planned an Extension youth career. The implication is that 50 per cent of the agents who decided on an Extension career planned to use the county 4-H position as a "stepping stone" to achieve another position to which they aspired. The agents in the present group showed the least interest in Extension work and its youth program as a career. It is noteworthy that the agent group, former-discontinued, which had resigned from Extension, is the group which indicated the greatest intention of making Extension work a career. Likewise, noteworthy is the fact that the group, former-continued, which resigned the county 4-H position for another Extension position, is the group which indicated the most interest in an Extension youth work career.

Fifty-eight per cent of the respondents said their spouses understood the duties connected with the 4-H position at the time of their employment, 18 per cent said they did not and 24 per cent did not know or were not married.

The relatively little variation among the groups indicated that this factor did not influence agent tenure in the 4-H position. The former-discontinued group showed the most spouse understanding, while the present group showed the least.

Age of respondents at the time of their employment showed very little correlation to length of tenure. The mean age at employment of the present group was 27.7 years, the former-discontinued group was 26.1 years, and the former-continued group was 25.7 years of age. The present group had five agents over the age of 40 at the time of employment, while the oldest respondents in the former-discontinued and former-continued groups were 35 and 34 years of age, respectively.

The primary occupation of the respondents' parents at the time of the respondents' high school graduation was, by an overwhelming margin, that of farming, with 78 per cent full-time and 3 per cent part-time farming. Professional services and manufacturing each claimed 8 per cent of the parents, with another 3 per cent teaching and 2 per cent in commercial trades. The differences found among the agent classification groups were insignificant.

A total of 114 of the 118 respondents reported farm experience. The majority of these had eleven or more years of farming experience after ten years of age. The mean weighted average among the three groups varies only by one-half of one year.

The differences among agent groups in undergraduate degree majors are insignificant, with most having majored in agricultural education. The number of advanced degrees earned varies considerably among the agent groupings. The former-continued group had 47 per cent of the advanced degrees, the former-discontinued group had 37 per cent, and the present group had the remaining 16 per cent of the degrees. Graduate degrees were earned by 53 per cent of the respondents. Doctor of Philosophy

degrees were earned by ten agents in the former groups and by none of those in the present group. Forty-eight per cent of the graduate degree majors were in agricultural education, with no other major area of study having more than 10 per cent of the total. The variation in the number of advanced degrees earned by the agents in the three groups could reflect a possible influence on the attitudes of county Extension agents, 4-H toward remaining in or leaving their positions.

The institutions at which undergraduate and graduate degrees were pursued showed little variation among the agent groups, except for the fact that 21 per cent of the present agents received their undergraduate degrees at institutions other than The Ohio State University, while only 2 and 8 per cent were indicated in the former 4-H agent groups. Also, the quarter of graduation showed little difference among the agent groups.

A total of 67 agents, or 56 per cent, had done graduate study beyond their last degree. Sixty-four per cent of the former-continued group had continued their study, while 62 per cent of the present group and 44 per cent of the former-discontinued group had done so.

The respondents reported a total of 629 years of tenure in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, with a mean tenure of five years and five months. The mean tenure varied considerably among the agent groups. The former-continued group had a mean of nine years, two months; the former-discontinued group had four years, five months; and the present group had a mean tenure of one year, eleven months. A total of 437 years of tenure in the position of county Extension agent, 4-H was reported by the respondents. The mean tenure of the former-continued agents in the county 4-H position was four years, nine months; the former-discontinued group had a tenure mean of four years, three months; and the mean of the agents in the present group was one year and eleven months.

Sixty-one of the 118 respondents received occupation experience prior to their Extension employment. There was very little difference among the agent groups on the type of occupation or number of positions held. The occupations in which the greatest number of agents participated were teaching agriculture, commercial sales and administration, and military service. The mean number of positions by the agents who did not enter Extension directly from college is 1.7 positions. The only occupation experience factor which shows a difference among the agent groups is that of years of experience. The present agent group had almost twice as many years of occupational experience as either of the former agent groups. The agents in the present group accumulated 156 years of experience for a mean of seven years. This compares to a combined total of 159 years and a mean of four years for the agents in the two former groups.

Forty-three respondents held 61 positions and 172 years of service in occupations assumed after the termination of their Extension employment. The majority of these agents held positions in commercial sales and administration, out-of-state Extension, and teaching non-agricultural subjects.

Attitudes Toward Seventy-Six Position Factors

The reader is reminded that for each of the 76 position factors, each person responded to a five-point attitudinal scale. Mean weighted scores were computed, by agent groupings, for each factor. It will also be recalled that the 76 position factors were classified into nine position features. For each agent group, the factors under each feature were ranked by mean weighted scores. These rankings were then compared by computing a rank order correlation for each pair of agent groups. A high correlation indicated that the two groups being compared tended to agree on the rankings of their attitudes toward the factors within

a feature.

There was much agreement among the three agent classification groups on 11 specific factors in the job requirement feature. Both the mean scores and rankings of the factors showed much similarity in attitude. The rank order correlation computed on the rankings of the factors included in this feature between each agent group was significant at the .05 level. The former-continued group generally scored the job requirements the highest, followed in descending order by the present group and the former-discontinued group. Three factors which had mean scores of 4.0 or higher and received a majority of "like" or desirable scores from all respondents were "working with farm people," "teaching youth," and "teaching adults." Two of the job requirements factors received composite mean scores of 2.5 or less and a majority of "dislike" or undesirable scores from the agents; these were "preparing statistical and narrative reports," and "preparing written programs and plans of work."

The rank order correlation between the agent pairings on rankings of six job analysis features was significant at the .05 level. There was much similarity of mean scores among the agent groups with the former-continued group scoring the features somewhat higher than did the others, followed in descending order by the former-continued and present groups. The three job analysis features of "opportunity to make own schedule of work," "job diversification," and "experience derived from Extension teaching" had composite attitudinal mean scores of 4.0 or higher - a majority of "like" or desirable scores by the respondents. An undesirable attitude toward "competition for family interest" was reflected in a mean score of less than 2.5 and a majority of "dislike" scores by the respondents.

There was divergence of attitude toward the four salary factors among the three agent classification groups. The rank order correlation

revealed that each agent group pairing had rankings which differed to the extent of being not significant at the .05 level of confidence. Three of the four salary factors had composite mean scores of 2.5 or less, and a majority of undesirable scores; these were "salary ceilings," "salary schedules," and "salary increases based upon appropriations." The mean score on each salary factor was considerably lower for the former-discontinued group, with the former-continued group scoring them generally higher than the present group.

There was much agreement among the rankings of the six factors in the policy feature. All agent group comparisons on rankings were significant at the .05 level, and only slight differences existed in mean scores. The former-continued group consistently rated the policy factors the highest, while the present group generally scored them higher than did the former-discontinued group. The factors of "vacation provisions," "provisions for leaves for advanced study," and "retirement program" had composite mean scores of 4.0 or higher and a majority of desirable responses from the respondents.

Twenty factors in the working relations feature had quite similar mean scores and their rankings among agent groups were significant at the .05 level on a rank order correlation. The agents in the former-continued group generally scored the working relations factors slightly higher than did the agents in the other two groups. The present group scored the factors higher than did the former-discontinued group. Eight factors showed a very favorable attitudinal response. A majority of "like" scores and composite mean scores of 4.0 or higher were given to the following factors: "working with youth activities," "relations with county Extension 4-H committee," "working with volunteer leaders," "professional contacts and associations," "relations with co-workers," "non-professional contacts outside of Extension," "relations with the state 4-H Staff." The only

working relations factor which received a majority of undesirable scores and a composite mean score of 2.5 or less was "program directives from Extension administration."

There was a considerable degree of similarity of attitude among the agent classification groups on the six factors in the family feature associated with the position. The rankings of these factors by the three agent groups were identical, so the rank order correlation among the groups is significant at the .05 level. The mean scores on these factors were very similar between the two former agent groups, but the agents in the former-continued group scored them slightly higher. The agents in the present group consistently scored every factor lower than did the agents in the two former groups. None of the factors in the family feature received a majority of desirable scores from the respondents, but the factor of "leisure time for personal and family activities" had a composite mean score of less than 2.5 and a majority of undesirable scores.

The attitudes toward six personal factors associated with the position showed much similarity among the agent groups. The rank order correlation computed between the rankings of each agent group was significant at the .05 level. The mean scores on the factors were quite similar, with the highest scoring given by the former-continued group, followed in descending order by the former-discontinued and present groups. The factor of "personal growth as an employee" had a majority of desirable attitudinal responses from the agents, and a composite mean score of 4.0 or higher.

The attitudes of the respondents on nine pre-service training factors had a significant correlation of rankings between agent groups at the .05 level. The mean scores for the factors showed much agreement

among the agent groups. "Training in technical agriculture" received a majority of desirable scores from the agents, and had a mean score of 4.0 or higher. The former-discontinued group rated the pre-service training factors the highest, followed in descending order by the present and former-continued groups.

The range in mean scores among nine in-service training factors, by individual agent classification groups, was very close. These greatly similar mean scores, to a large degree, explain the large variation in ranking of the factors in this feature by the agent groups. The variation in rankings provided a rank order correlation that was not significant at the .05 level for any agent group pairing. The former-continued group rated the factors slightly higher than did the other two groups. The former-discontinued group provided the lowest over-all rating for the in-service training factors. None of the factors had a majority of desirable or undesirable scores.

Personal Comments

A total of 800 personal comments was made by the respondents to two open-end questions requesting the most desirable and most undesirable features of the county Extension agent, 4-H position. Of the comments made, 329 were desirable and 471 were undesirable comments. The job analysis, working relations, and personal features were the position factor groupings which commanded the greatest number of personal comments.

Twenty or more desirable comments were made on each of four position factors which were, in order of number of comments made: (1) "working with youth activities," (2) and (3) "working with volunteer leaders" and "opportunity to make own schedule of work," and (4) "job diversification." There were also four position factors which commanded 20 or more

undesirable comments. In descending order of number of comments made, these features were: (1) "length of working day," (2) "salary schedules," (3) "program directives from Extension administration," (4) "annual Extension salary."

Conclusions

1. The attitudes of county Extension agents, 4-H toward salary are associated with length of tenure. A significant difference existed in the rankings of salary features by agent groups; the agents with the least tenure in the county 4-H agent position and those who resigned from the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service gave lower attitudinal scores to the salary feature of the position.

2. The attitudes of county Extension agents, 4-H toward in-service training were associated with length of tenure. The agents with the least tenure and those who resigned from the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service gave lower attitudinal scores to the in-service training feature.

3. No significant difference existed in ranking of factors, by agent groups, in the position features of job requirements, job analysis, policy, working relations, family features, personal features, and pre-service training.

4. Tenure in the county 4-H agent position may be affected by differences found in the backgrounds of the present and former agent groups. The agents in the two former groups, who had the greatest tenure in the 4-H position, had a greater percentage of agents who had served in the military, fewer number of years of occupational experience prior to Extension employment, considered doing Extension work at an earlier time, a greater percentage who had earned their undergraduate degree at The Ohio State University, and had earned more advanced degrees.

5. Tenure in the county 4-H agent position is not affected by degree of participation in youth organizations, relationship between time of military service and Extension employment, age at time of Extension employment, number or type of occupational experiences prior to Extension appointment, occupation of parents, years of farm experience, type of influence on decision to do Extension work, type of undergraduate or graduate degree, quarter of college graduation, or spouse's understanding of the profession.

6. Some of the desirable factors of the county Extension agent, 4-H position in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, which apparently influence the length of tenure, are: working with farm people, teaching youth, teaching adults, opportunity to make own schedule of work, job diversification, experience derived from Extension teaching, vacation provisions, provisions for leaves for advanced study, retirement program, working with youth activities, relations with county Extension 4-H committee, working with volunteer leaders, professional contacts and associations, relations with co-workers, support of youth program by co-workers, non-professional contacts outside of Extension, relations with state 4-H staff, personal growth as an employee, and pre-service training in technical agriculture.

7. Some of the undesirable features of the county Extension agent, 4-H position in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service, which apparently influence the length of tenure, are: preparing written programs and plans of work, preparing statistical and narrative reports, competition for family interest, salary ceilings, salary schedules, salary increases based upon appropriations, program directives from Extension administration, and leisure time for personal and family activities.

8. A large percentage of county Extension agents, 4-H did not plan to make Extension youth work a career at the time of their employment. Approximately 67 per cent of the respondents planned to make Extension work a career at the time of their employment and only 34 per cent planned an Extension youth career. Fifty per cent of the agents who planned an Extension career planned to use the county 4-H agent position to achieve another Extension position to which they aspired.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were based upon the data obtained in this study, the review of related research and literature, and through conferences and conversations with other faculty members in the Ohio Cooperative Extension Service. They were tempered by the judgment developed by this researcher as a result of his experiences as a county Extension agent, 4-H, a county Extension agent, agriculture, and an area Extension agent, 4-H in Ohio.

1. Develop greater understanding of the system of salary determination. Much evidence exists that agents do not understand salary adjustment procedures. If supervisory personnel have justification for the salary determinations which they make, there is no reason for a 4-H agent to not understand his salary or to believe that there is inequality of salary among agent positions. Supervisory personnel need to be effective in performance appraisal, specific in their suggestions for improvement of professional competence, and "open and frank" in their discussion of salary determination in counseling sessions.

2. Improve the salary levels to provide compensation comparable to allied occupational fields. This could be accomplished by placing greater priority on salary in future appropriation requests and increasing the budget for present faculty salaries over creation of new positions and filling vacancies. With the salary base for county

Extension agents, 4-H presently being provided by county appropriations, accomplishing this recommendation seems realistic in light of the already apparent insecurity created by the procedure.

3. Increase the number of county Extension agents, 4-H in the counties. This would reduce the concerns of agents and their families with unreasonable hours of work and over-extended position requirements. This would also reduce the concern of agents with the program directives from Extension administration which require more agent time and effort to accomplish. It would also provide the opportunity for agents to specialize in certain program areas. A large percentage of the additional county Extension agents, 4-H should be women, interested in and trained in youth work. This has many implications for improving agent tenure and effectiveness of the 4-H Club program in reaching its objectives.

4. Increase the number of para-professionals employed in Extension youth work at the county level. This would eliminate some of the concern of 4-H agents and their families with the lack of time for personal and family activities. Employment of this type of personnel can also contribute in relating the 4-H Club program to a greater percentage of the potential 4-H audiences. It would also eliminate the requirement of professional faculty members to perform many tasks for which the time involved results in limited productivity and is not commensurate with the professional image deserving of a county 4-H position.

5. Simplify the required monthly and annual statistical reports, the semi-annual narrative reports, and the annual narrative plans of work. Evidence indicates that 4-H agents dislike reporting requirements of the position. Simultaneously with simplifying the required reports,

create a better understanding of the necessity for any reports requested; enlighten the agents about the specific use and/or value received from the reports as submitted.

6. Reduce the practice of utilizing the county 4-H agent position as a training position for other Extension employment. Fifty per cent of the agents who planned to make Extension work a career at the time of their employment planned to use the 4-H position to achieve another Extension position to which they aspired. Prospective personnel who are not interested in youth work or who do not plan to make Extension youth work a career should not be required, under any circumstances, to accept a county 4-H position as a prerequisite to Extension employment. This should increase tenure in the 4-H position and the quality of county 4-H programs.

7. Employ a greater percentage of county Extension agents, 4-H who are youth oriented, trained in education and human relations, and desire careers in youth work. Presently, only 34 per cent of the 4-H agents plan to make Extension youth work a career at the time of their employment. This recommendation can be accomplished by employing more non-agricultural college graduates; one-third of all new 4-H personnel being other than agriculture graduates, may be a realistic initial goal from which adjustment could be made. This would involve providing the county agricultural agent with the opportunity and the responsibility to assume a similar resource role, in the 4-H program, to that presently being fulfilled by county home economics agents. Such a procedure would provide greater utilization of county faculty resources in program development, conduct, and effectiveness. It would also improve the probability of increased tenure in the county 4-H positions and the benefits derived from that increased tenure.

8. Provide equal opportunity for county Extension agents, 4-H to be named as county chairman. This recommendation can eliminate many undesirable position features as voiced by 4-H agents in this study. It will improve the prestige of the county 4-H position within the Extension organization, will provide 4-H agents with equal compensation opportunities, and will aid in the recognition of the 4-H position as being of equal importance and stature with other positions by the people in the county. These factors may have a positive influence on length of 4-H agent tenure, thus improving continuity and effectiveness of county 4-H programs.

9. Continue the emphasis by supervisors in the area of faculty working relations. There was much criticism in this study concerning co-workers, which have implications for affecting 4-H program quality and 4-H agent tenure. The evidence indicates that supervisory personnel must attempt to identify these situations quickly and take definite, positive action to resolve them.

10. Additional research needs to be conducted in:

a. A comparison of the findings of the Jenkins study on factors influencing the tenure of men agents in Ohio with the findings of this study.

b. Factors influencing the tenure of County Extension Agents, Home Economics in Ohio.

c. A feasibility study on doubling or tripling the number of County Extension Agents, 4-H in Ohio.

d. Factors influencing tenure of women in Extension 4-H agent positions.

e. Desirable characteristics of para-professionals in Extension youth work.

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